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For editing of Final Report (check w/ Report)

DRAFT 6/26/64

Rankin Papers Box 26 F. 385

(16)

CHAPTER ONE:

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy on November 22, 1963, was a grievous wrong against a person, a family, a nation, and against people everywhere. A young and vigorous leader whose years of public and private life stretched before him was the victim of the fourth Presidential assassination in the history of a people dedicated to peaceful political change. This Commission was created on November 29, 1963, in recognition of the right of the people of this country, and of all nations, to complete and truthful knowledge concerning these events. This report has been prepared in the hope that to these tragic events there may have been brought those qualities of fairness and respect for the rule of law which form our vital experience and cherished tradition as a free people.

Narrative of Events

At 11:40 a.m. (Central Standard Time) on Friday, November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy, and their accompanying party arrived at Love Field, Dallas, Texas. Behind them was the beginning of a Texas trip planned five months before by the President, Vice President Johnson and John B. Connally, Governor of Texas. After a departure from the White House on Thursday morning, the itinerary had taken the President and his party through a brief stop at San Antonio

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where Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson joined the party and where the President dedicated the new Aero-Space Medical Health Center. Following a testimonial dinner in Houston for an outstanding Democratic Congressman, the President flew to Fort Worth where he spent the night and spoke at a large breakfast gathering on Friday.

Ahead lay a motorcade through downtown Dallas, a speech at the Trade Mart, and a flight to Austin where the President would attend a reception, speak at a Democratic fund-raising dinner, and then proceed to the Texas ranch of the Vice President. Evident on this trip were the varied roles which an American President may be called upon to perform - Head of State, Chief Executive, party leader, and, in this case, candidate for re-election in a democratic country.

The Dallas motorcade, it was hoped, would give the President the opportunity to demonstrate his personal popularity in a city which he had lost in the 1960 election. Once it had been decided that the trip to Texas could span two days, it was generally agreed by those responsible for planning, primarily Governor Connally and Kenneth P. O'Donnell, a Special Assistant to the President, that a motorcade through Dallas would be desirable. The route was selected initially by the agents of the United States Secret Service who were responsible for the advance preparations for the Dallas phase of the trip. Originally notified about the trip on November 4, the agents were told that the motorcade should take approximately 45 minutes and should give the greatest number of people in Dallas an opportunity to see the President. Given these instructions and the selection by the Secret Service of the Trade Mart as the luncheon site, the motorcade route selected was a natural one. The route was approved by the local

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host committee and White House representatives on November 18 and publicized in the local papers on November 19. This advance publicity made it clear that the motorcade would leave Main Street and pass the intersection of Elm and Houston Streets on the way to the Stemmons Freeway and the Trade Mart.

Clearing skies had dispelled an early threat of rain and the President was able to greet the people of Dallas from his open limousine without the plastic "bubble top," which was at the time designed only as a protection against inclement weather. Seated to the left of the President in the rear seat was Mrs. Kennedy. In the jump seats were Governor Connally, who was in front of the President, and Mrs. Connally, who was seated to the Governor's left. Special Agent William R. Greer of the Secret Service was driving, and Special Agent Roy H. Kellerman was sitting to his right. Directly behind the Presidential limousine was an open "follow-up" car with eight Secret Service agents, two in the front seat, two in the rear and two on each running board. These agents, in accord with normal Secret Service procedures, were instructed to scan the crowds, the roofs and windows of buildings, overpasses, and crossings for signs of trouble during the course of the motorcade. Behind the "follow-up" car in the motorcade was the Vice Presidential car, carrying the Vice President and Mrs. Johnson, and Senator Ralph W. Yarborough, a Vice Presidential "follow-up" car, several cars for other

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dignitaries, representatives of the press and others.

The motorcade left Love Field at approximately 11:55 a.m., and proceeded through residential neighborhoods, stopping twice at the President's request to greet well-wishers among the friendly crowds. On each occasion when the President's car halted, Secret Service agents from the "follow-up" car moved forward to assume a protective stance near the President. As the motorcade reached Main Street, a principal east-west artery in downtown Dallas, the welcome became tumultuous. At the extreme west end of Main Street the motorcade turned right on Houston Street and proceeded north for one block so as to turn left on Elm Street, the most direct approach to the Stemmons Freeway and the Trade Mart. As the President's car approached the intersection of Houston and Elm Streets, there loomed directly ahead on the intersection's northwest corner a seven-story red brick warehouse and office building, the Texas School Book Depository. Riding in the Vice President's car, Agent Rufus W. Youngblood of the Secret Service noticed that the clock atop the building indicated 12:30 p.m., the scheduled arrival time at the Trade Mart. The President's car made a sharp left turn on to Elm Street and, at a rate of about 11 miles per hour, started the gradual descent to pass under a railroad overpass under which the motorcade would pass before reaching the Stemmons Freeway. The front of the Texas School Book Depository was now on his right, and the President waved to the crowd which had assembled

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there as he passed the building. Dealey Plaza - a landscaped area marking the western end of downtown Dallas - stretched out to the President's left. A Secret Service agent in the lead car radioed the Trade Mart that the motorcade would arrive in five minutes.

Seconds later shots were heard in rapid succession. The President's hands moved to his neck and he stiffened in his seat. A bullet had entered his back at a point slightly above the shoulder and to the right of the spine. It traveled a downward path, and exited from the front of the neck, causing a nick in the left lower portion of the knot in the President's necktie. When the shooting started, Governor Connally, who had been facing toward the crowd on the right, started to turn toward the left, ~~in order to see the President.~~ Near the start of this turn the Governor suddenly felt a blow on his back. He had been hit by a bullet which entered at the extreme right side of his back at a point below his right armpit. The bullet traveled through his chest in a downward and forward direction, exited below his right nipple, passed through his right wrist which had been in his lap, and then caused a wound to his left thigh. The force of the bullet appeared to spin the Governor to his right and he then fell back into his wife's lap. President Kennedy was then hit by a second bullet which struck the right rear portion of his head and caused a massive and fatal wound. The President fell to the left into Mrs. Kennedy's lap.

On the lefthand side of the President's "follow-up" car, Special Agent Clinton J. Hill jumped off and raced for the President's car when he heard a noise like a firecracker and saw the President

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lurch forward and to the left. Back in the front seat of the Vice Presidential car, Special Agent Rufus W. Youngblood heard an explosion and noticed unnatural movements in the crowd. He leaped into the rear seat to protect the Vice President as other shots were fired. At the same time Special Agent Roy H. Kellerman in the front seat of the Presidential limousine turned to observe the President. Seeing that the President was hit, Kellerman instructed the driver "let's get out of here. We are hit." and radioed ahead to the lead car to "Get us to a hospital immediately." Simultaneously with Kellerman's instructions, Special Agent William R. Greer accelerated the Presidential car. As the car lurched forward, Special Agent Hill managed to climb on the back of the car, [push Mrs. Kennedy back into the rear seat,] and shield the stricken President and Mrs. Kennedy as the car sped to a hospital.

The President's car proceeded at high speed to Parkland Memorial Hospital, four miles away. The President was immediately treated by a team of physicians who noted irregular breathing movements and a possible heart beat, although they could not detect a pulse beat. The doctors observed the extensive wound in the President's head and a small wound approximately 1/4 inch in diameter in the lower third of his front neck. In an effort to facilitate breathing, the physicians enlarged the throat wound and inserted a tube, performing what is known as a tracheotomy. Totally absorbed in the immediate task of trying to preserve the President's life, the attending